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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0080
INFO GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHMS/AMEMBASSY MUSCAT

UNCLAS MUSCAT 000080

SENSITIVE
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DEPT FOR DRL
NEA/PPD DBENZE
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM PREL KPAO MU

SUBJECT: EMBASSY MUSCAT RESPONDS TO PRESS ANTI-SEMITISM

REF: a) MUSCAT 055

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1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On January 4 and 9, privately owned, jointly operated English and Omani papers carried an editorial, bylined to the papers' owner/editor, titled "How Israel Became a Terrorist State." The column contained gross anti-Semitism amounting to sympathy with Nazi Germany, as well as alleging American subservience to international Judaism. In response, post crafted a letter expressing distaste and indignation and at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' request sent it via diplomatic note, highlighting in that note how the piece serves as fodder for Embassy reporting on human rights and religious freedom. No response has yet been received. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) Daily newspapers "The Times of Oman" (English) and "Al-Shabiba" (Arabic), as well as free weekly tabloid "Hi!" (English) are owned and nominally edited by Issa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali, the elderly head of a prominent Omani business family. Zedjali's weekly "Viewpoint" column, generally believed to be ghostwritten and frequently fractious in tone, appears in all three. On Sunday, January 4 (reprinted on Friday, January 9 in the weekly), the column decried Israel's actions in Gaza and tied them to alleged historical nefariousness which "impelled Hitler to punish the Jews for their bad deeds." Regarding the U.S., it continued,

"...the Jews wield enormous control over all important decisions, whether they relate to politics, economy or media. No American citizen is free today to utter a single word about international or even national issues. This is the reason the American views on various issues being relayed to the world through the media are in fact the views of the Jews."

(Full text of the column is available online at timesofoman.com/view_point.asp?details=on&rat_opic_nd=238)

3. (SBU) The Embassy responded with a letter from the DCM to Al-Zedjali's son (who holds the title of Managing Director of the family's media outlets), reminding him of his responsibility to present fact-based editorial content and saying the column:

"...perpetuates the worst sorts of stereotypes about the Arab mindset as one that is narrow, misguided, and blinkered by fanaticism. It is unworthy of the Sultanate's enlightened civil discourse."

4. (SBU) Post had intended only to copy the letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (noting it as "the kind of material which, at the direction of the United States Congress, the Embassy is obligated to discuss in public documents such as the annual worldwide country reports on Human Rights and Religious Freedom"), but at the Ministry's request sent it to the paper through the MFA via dipnote (standard practice in Oman with most of our interactions even with privately owned media).

5. As of January 28, MFA contacts declined to confirm that the letter had been forwarded to the younger Al Zedjali (although they did confirm that there had been communication between the Ministry and the author regarding the column), prompting Post to send a copy to Al Zedjali directly.

6. (SBU) COMMENT: While the papers involved are privately owned, as with all of Oman's media, they are subject to generally observed norms that, while falling short of formal censorship, amount to pervasive self-censorship. That the column in question not only appeared, but was reprinted five days later indicates official tolerance, however grudging, of this kind of content - possibly a reflection of growing accommodation to local public opinion regarding the Arab response to Gaza (REFTEL). END COMMENT.
GRAPPO

To view the entire SMART message, go to URL http://repository.state.sgov.gov/_layouts/OSS/SearchResults.aspx?k=messageid:be41f975-b2d2-4861-b0